

EDITORIAL

Notts Trade Union News is heading into a recession, although as Editor I would like you to know that this is as a result of the global markets, rather than any mistakes made by NTUN.

It is rather worrying that the commentators who have talked up the recession for so long, do seem to share some characteristics. They have all in recent years consistently told us to vote Tory, they all write long pieces saying unemployment must be higher, and none of them have been appointed to Saint Tony's taskforces.

In fact with the number of taskforces created by New Labour, it is amazing we still have any unemployment, but then the nominees do tend to be from the higher echelons of business. Perhaps that is it? The business leaders who drive our economy are so busy on Tony's taskforces and quangos that they do not have time to run their businesses!!

Eddie George, Governor of the Bank of England recently admitted that the price of continued prosperity in the South East was rising unemployment in the North East. I don't believe for one minute he meant everybody in the South East.

For those of you following the bail out of the LTCM hedge fund, which had borrowed 250 times its own value from the bank, the following comment by the chair of the US house committee on banking is rather illuminating:

(Contd. Col. 2)

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"Working as a cartel, those running LTCM potentially comprise the most powerful financial force in the history of the world and could influence the well-being of nation states for good or for nought, guided by profit motive, rather than national interest standards".

Never. I will have to write a book exposing this. I thought a title like Das Kapital would be rather catchy. I may even start with a shorter work and put Manifesto in the title. Any suggestions from readers as to the full title would be welcome. At the beginning, I said NTUN is heading into a recession. You may have noticed the long gap between the previous issue and this one. For three years we have maintained a bi-monthly publishing schedule. Unfortunately illness decimated the small dedicated team (2 out of 3), who produce NTUN. Our next issue will be out in the New Year, and if you send us at least £25 we will feature your New Year greetings. For rates contact Ian Juniper (0115) 9582369. Note to GMB: the NTUN away strip is available for sponsorship.

Jon O'Neill.

P.S. We will let you know if our Treasurer is successful in persuading our bankers, Unity Trust, to lend us 250 times our income in the next issue.

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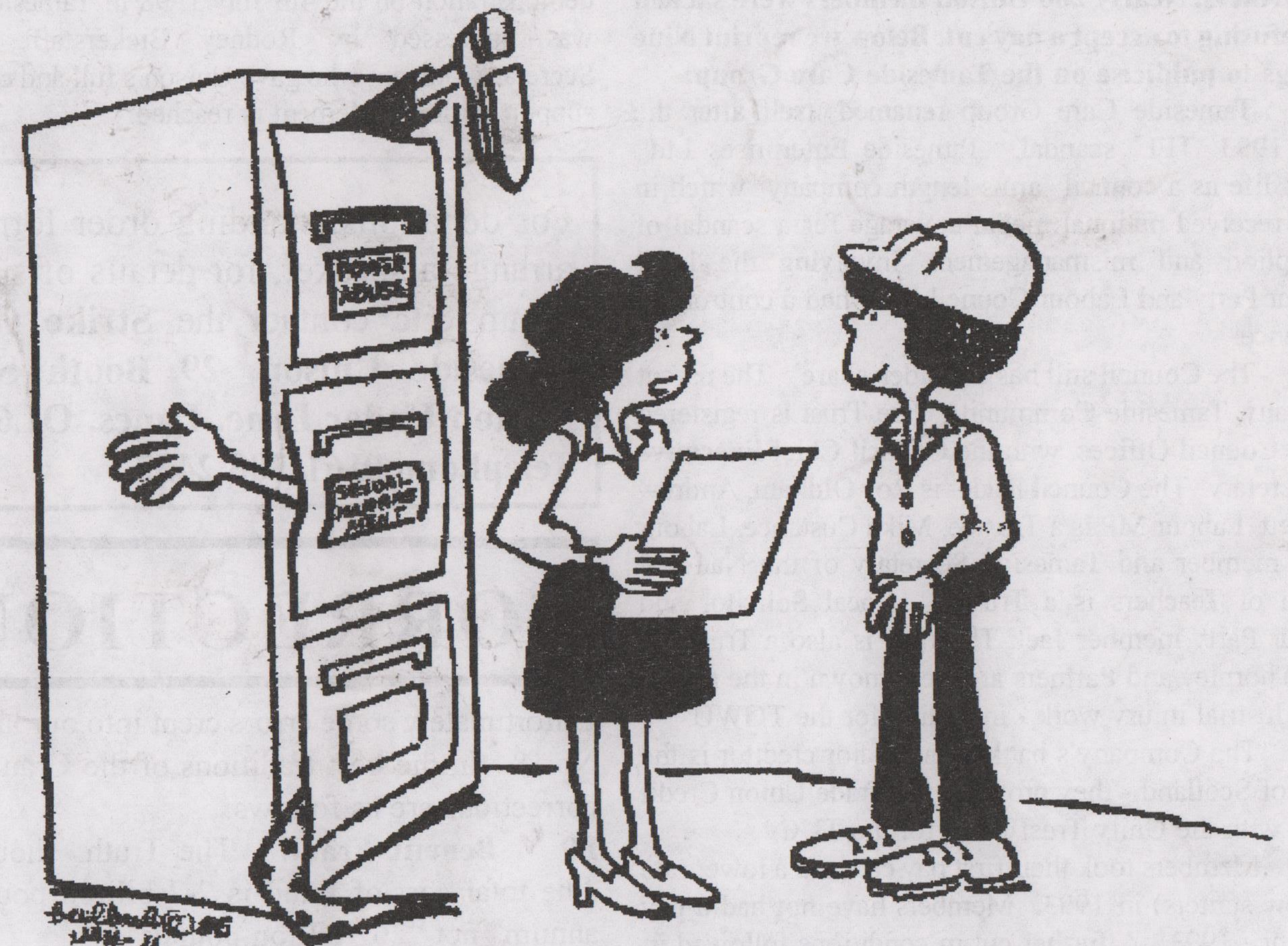


"Aiming to keep you safe"

NOTTS TU NEWS

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... OUR FILE ON ABUSIVE SUPERVISORS & MANAGERS

CONTENTS

- | | |
|---|---|
| P2. Thameside Care Group: Strike Update | P7. Health & Safety |
| P3. M25 Three Update | P8. Robert Irminger |
| P4. Stop the Deportation of Columbus Anyanwu & Family | P9. Call Centres: The New Assembly Lines? |
| P5. Lockout '73 | P11. Services for our Community |

CAMPAIGNING & DISPUTES

TAMESIDE CARE GROUP STRIKE - UPDATE

We recently received an update on this dispute from the strikers. Nearly 200 Unison members were sacked for refusing to accept a pay cut. Below we reprint Nine Things to publicise on the Tameside Care Group:

1. Tameside Care Group renamed itself after the 1992/1993 'TEL' scandal. Tameside Enterprises Ltd., began life as a council 'arms length company' which in 1993 received national media coverage for a scandal of corruption and mismanagement, involving the local Labour Party and Labour Council, who had a controlling influence.
2. The Council still has a 'golden share'. The parent company, Tameside Community Care Trust is registered to the Council Offices, with the Council Chief Executive as Secretary. The Council leader is Roy Oldham, Andrew Bennett, Labour MP is a Trustee, Mike Custance, Labour Party member and Tameside Secretary of the National Union of Teachers is a Trustee. Local Solicitor and Labour Party member Jack Thornley is also a Trustee - Jack Thornley and Partners are well known in the region for industrial injury work - including for the TGWU.
3. The Company's banker and major creditor is the Bank of Scotland - they provide 'the Trade Union Credit Card' with the Unity Trust Bank for the TUC.
4. Members took their first pay cut (and a lower rate for new starters) in 1993. Members have not had a pay rise since 1993. A further cut in conditions followed in 1996, with cuts in sick pay and maternity leave.
5. On the 30th January 1998 the company issued a notice to all employees terminating their existing contracts for new contracts from 1st May 1998 which meant a reduced hourly pay rate (up to £2.08 per hour), cut holiday leave and ending paid sick leave.
6. Members have had two ballots, one in support of industrial action for a modest pay rise, the second, the strike ballot, overwhelmingly in favour of strike action (290 for, against 29).
7. The sacked members defied dismissal whilst on strike on 1st May 1998 and 28th May 1998, with dismissals taking place of 200 Unison members on 3rd and 4th July 1998. *Dismissals included members on long term sick and one who was on maternity leave.*
8. The Company made a £750,000 *net profit* in 1997/98 according to the Managing Director, Alan Firth, during meetings held after the strike began.
9. The Dispute is an official Unison Dispute -

Unison Conference gave support to a Nationally backed demonstration on the 4th July 1998 in Tameside, which was addressed by Rodney Bickerstaffe, General Secretary, Unison, who gave Unison's full and continuing support until a settlement is reached.

For donations, standing order forms, to arrange a speaker, for details of support groups etc contact the **Strike Office, Tameside Unison, 29 Booth Street, Ashton Under Lyne, Lancs, OL6 7LB Telephone 0161 308 2452.**

CORRECTIONS

Unfortunately some errors crept into our last issue, No.18. In the best traditions of the Grauniad the corrections are as follows:

P9 Benefit Fraud - The Truth: should read "the total cost of fraud is 2-7 billion pounds per annum" not "267 billion pounds".

P12 Winter of Discontent should read "Dave Basnett of the GMWU" not "Dave Bassett", who we all know is the manager of our county's worst football team.

Thank you.

PS Come on you Stags!!!

PPS A suitable punishment for the person responsible for these errors is now being sought, current suggestions are: a) made to resign from the GMB and join another union. b) made to watch Nottingham Forest. Both suggestions have been dismissed as being "inhumane and cruel in the extreme". Any suggestions? Please send to "Tonya".

CAMPAIGNING & DISPUTES

M25 THREE: UPDATE

The Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC) took over the responsibility of investigating the case of the M25 Three from the Home Office on the 7 April 1997. When the Home Office passed over the case a note was attached to the papers asking the CCRC to deal with the case as a matter of urgency. Within days the CCRC responded they would be dealing with the case as a matter of priority.

That was 16 months ago. Even though the CCRC called in the Greater Manchester Police in September 1997 to assist and speed up the review the CCRC have still not reached a decision on whether or not they are going to refer our cases back to the Court of Appeal. In a meeting this August with the M25 lawyers and the CCRC we discovered the police enquiry is not finished, despite assurances to Sir Peter Lloyd that it would be in weeks, and that they still have no idea when the review would be complete. This is an appalling state of affairs and stain against the CCRC.

A significant amount of new evidence has been discovered by our solicitors, the BBC Rough Justice documentary and even the CCRC itself which reinforces how unsafe the M25 Three's convictions are. For example:

In 1994 we discovered a forensic report, that the police withheld from the jury and defence at the trial, which details the findings of fingerprints found at the scenes of crime and on the stolen cars which do not match any of the convicted three.

In 1994 we discovered a document showing how Kate Williamson, a key prosecution witness, lied on oath at the trial in a calculated way.

In 1994 our defence commissioned an independent forensic report. It suggests a footprint found at a scene of crime may have been made by a size six and half boot. None of the convicted are this size.

In August 1995 we discovered a police internal document, withheld from the defence by the police, which shows how a key prosecution witness held the police to ransom by threatening not to give evidence for the police if they charged him with any criminal offence.

In March 1998 the BBC Rough Justice programme obtained a taped recorded conversation which revealed for the first time that the accomplice/possible perpetrator Norman Duncan:

Was forced to give incriminating evidence by the police who threatened to charge him with criminal offences.

Was not charged with various criminal offences he admitted in exchange for his evidence.

Was paid £10,200 reward money for his evidence. Colluded with the police to conceal from the jury the truth about his arrest and evidence.

Was told what to say to cover up an interview the police

conducted with him.

We discovered in March 1998 a document that established a Detective Chief Inspector was told that the robbers consisted of two white men and one black man but he withheld this crucial information from the defence.

Close inspection of police documents in March 1998 establish the police conducted various unrecorded interviews with key witnesses in breach of Police and Criminal Evidence Act.

In March 1998 the BBC Rough Justice programme discovered a witness who saw the murdered victim and his partner in a pub at a time the prosecution claimed they were not in the pub. This evidence is significant alibi material for the M25 Three and proves the friend of the murdered man lied at the trial.

In March 1998 the BBC Rough Justice programme discovered a witness who revealed for the first time that the friend of the man who was killed told him that one of the robbers had white hands and fair hair. This evidence not only proves the three convicted black men are not guilty but also that the friend of the man that was killed lied on oath in court about the robbers descriptions.

We have presented evidence that established two police officers made statements knowing they were perverting the course of justice in order to cover up conversations with a prosecution witness.

We have submitted material which suggest the Prosecution lied to the defence about forensic evidence and deals with prosecution witnesses. Therefore the CCRC have been presented with a vast amount of new evidence which totally undermines the convictions and the integrity of the original police investigation. So why the continuous delays on reaching a decision. Please write to the Chairman of the CCRC in support of our demand that they refer the case to the Court of Appeal without any further delays.

If you require further details or information about the case, then please contact the campaign at:

**M25 Campaign
28 Grimsel Path
London
SE5 0TB
Tel/Fax: 0171 735 2985**

or Telephone Solicitor: Jim Nichol 0171 272 8336

CAMPAIGNING & DISPUTES

STOP THE DEPORTATION OF COLUMBUS ANYANWU & FAMILY

In July 1998 the Home Office informed Columbus that they had refused his application for political asylum and will commence deportation proceedings. Columbus and his family now require your support to persuade the Home Secretary to discontinue with the deportation.

COLUMBUS'S CLAIM FOR ASYLUM:

Columbus was an official of the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC). This is equivalent in Nigeria of the Trade Unions Congress. He first came to this country in 1989 and completed a two year Labour studies diploma course at Ruskin College, Oxford. He studied this course so he could continue with his work with the labour movement in Nigeria. He returned to Nigeria and witnessed the countries corruption and internal disruption which culminated in the military dictatorship under General Abacha. As a trade unionist activist for a democratic change in Nigeria, Columbus spoke out and because of his involvement in the struggle for the installation of civil rule in Nigeria, he and his colleagues were subjected to continuous harassment and intimidation.

In 1994 Columbus had the opportunity to come back to this country to undertake a masters degree in Comparative Labour studies at Warwick University. He welcomed this opportunity and looked forward to returning to Nigeria in order to use his greater education in the interest of the Nigerian Labour Movement and people.

Whilst completing his studies Columbus learned that the NLC had fallen under the control of the military regime, whose outright disregard for civil liberties and human rights led to the outrageous state murder of nine environmental activists including Ken Saro-Wiwa. Columbus was advised by friends in Nigeria not to return there while the military regime had absolute authority and control in seeking to silence its opponents.

Concerned about his and his family's welfare he applied for political asylum.

Last October the Government quite rightly refused the Nigerian delegation to the Commonwealth Conference admittance to this country in attempt to pressure the regime back to democratic course. The fact that they intend to take that course is yet to be proved.

Recent developments in Nigeria do not ensure the safety of Columbus and his family should they be deported to Nigeria. The military junta has promised democratic elections as a result of world wide pressure. They have now put back that again from October to May 1999.

The situation in Nigeria is unstable. Nigeria may or may not return to democratic politics. Columbus may still be targeted

by the new rulers because of his opposition to the military dictatorship and trade union activity.

COLUMBUS'S FAMILY AND SITUATION HERE:

This is Columbus's second trip to study in England and he has now been here since September 1994. He is married and has three children. His eldest child is settled here and attends a local primary school in Coventry. His youngest child was born on 25th June this year. Columbus's wife, Ukachi has suffered ill health and stress arising from the family's insecure position here and because of these difficulties she went into premature labour. The family are under tremendous stress.

Columbus has been socially active. He has successfully completed high level education. He has completed voluntary work for a Welfare Agency and charities. Columbus and his family wish to remain in this country. He has legitimate fear of persecution should he be deported to Nigeria. His family are well settled here and make a contribution to society. Columbus will not benefit from Jack Straw's announcement of 'amnesty' because the Home Office have taken a decision upon his application way back in March 1998 although they have not communicated the full reasons for the decision to him or his legal representatives. This is like a sentence hanging over his head.

Columbus Anyanwu and family support campaign is supported by the following:

Bob Ainsworth MP, Jim Cunningham MP, Geoff Robinson MP, Christine Oddy MEP, Coventry Against Racism, Coventry Trade Union Council, Coventry Indian Workers Association, John Monks: General Secretary TUC, Mike Walsh: Head of International Department - TUC, Stephen Faulkner: Education Officer Commonwealth TUC, Bob Purkis: National Secretary Equalities T&GWU.

YOUR SUPPORT IS ALSO DESPERATELY NEEDED

• Write to Mike O'Brien MP at the House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA (Home Office reference number C426910) demanding that he allows Columbus and his family to stay here.

• Financial support is also urgently needed to ensure a successful campaign. Please send cheques payable to Columbus Anyanwu & Family Support Campaign (CAFSC), Unit 15, The Arches, Coventry, CV1 3JQ.

• Your help is needed:- Contact the Campaign direct.

HISTORICAL LOCKOUT '73

In 1973, new machinery had been installed in some departments of the Nottingham Evening Post. Slade and NGA1 were jointly involved in apparently amicable negotiations on the terms and conditions relating to the new equipment. Six days before the discussions were due to be finalised management instructed SLADE members to operate the new Letterflex plate making machine - or be sacked. Both the NGA and NUJ indicated that they would not participate in producing a newspaper before the agreements were ratified. The following day NGA members were given the ultimatum "produce the paper using the Letterflex or go home!" It was a lockout. It lasted six weeks. So started one of the most bitter disputes in Nottingham since the General Strike.

The Post and the Guardian Journal were the main constituents of the Nottingham newspaper monopoly T. Bailey Foreman (TBF) owned by the Hardy family which also controlled Kimberley Brewery and was one of the county's biggest landowners. The managing director of TBF was Christopher Pole-Carew.

The unions immediately established a Liaison Committee under the chairmanship of Guardian journalist 'Buck' Hooper and established their committee rooms on North Street over what is now Blacks. The NGA at the time had been excluded from the TUC because it had registered, contrary to TUC policy, as a trade union under the 1971 Industrial Relations Act. In the circumstances the common enemy was recognised, unity in action was supreme and all unions played their full part without sectarianism - an object lesson for today.

After the immediate tasks of organising the picket lines, the Liaison Committee addressing the question of developing support met with the Trades Council Executive which, on Lionel Jacobs' suggestion, offered to underwrite the cost of 60,000 leaflets for distribution to the public. We carefully didn't tell the Post workers that Council did not have that sort of money but were prepared to gamble because the principles of the dispute were of importance to the whole movement. I was also instructed by the executive to liaise

with the dispute committee onto which I was co-opted and, since I was looking for work, paid dispute pay.

The major task for the Liaison Committee was to develop expressions of solidarity. There were two main aspects: finance and blacking the scab paper which was being pushed out, the response to both was remarkable. Cash just flowed in, print chapels throughout the country levied their members; the Notts. NUM donated £1,000; shop stewards' committees at most of the city's big firms made immediate donations and held weekly collections. From week one we were able to pool all the dispute benefits and raise the payment level of SOGAT and Natsopa members to £22 from between £3 and £6. After the first week we were never short of money for leaflets, travel expenses or any of the untold costs which are incurred in industrial struggle.

We never managed to stop production of the paper but it was reduced to half its normal size, its circulation never exceeded a third of normal, it was atrociously produced, and we had significant success in organising an advertising boycott. Shop stewards blocked all known factory sales,

many newsagents refused to handle it and street sellers found their popularity declining. The City and County councils barred blackleg journalists and stopped all advertising, while Forest manager Brian Clough refused scab journalists all access to the club.

During the latter half of the lockout the workers' liaison committee produced its own newspaper The Press three times a week using Russell

Press facilities and equipment on a solidarity basis. I don't remember what the print run was but by the end it was up to the capacity of the Heidelberg presses, not all that short of matching the scab paper in quantity and far exceeding it in quality - but then we had all the expertise! It was priced at 2p but most who bought it paid more with many refusing to accept change for a £1 note - that was reader-solidarity. I believe the Nottingham Central Library has a full set which is well worth examining.

There were about forty scabs and I still have a list of their inglorious names. We had just over 300 people involved and I believe every one of them played a part. A man or



HISTORICAL

LOCKOUT '73

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5)

woman could be on the picket line from 6a.m. to 10a.m., then go off for a seven hour stint producing the paper, after which paper selling became the priority - then maybe back to the picket line or off to address a meeting. The spirit was exhilarating.

One Friday afternoon, the key day for local papers, we organised a slow motorcade around the block to cause as much obstruction of the gates as possible. Of three exits management had shut off two so we only had Burton Street to worry about. Our cars dashed along Trinity Square, Forman Street and Sherwood Street to join the slow nose to tail cavalcade past the gate. We didn't stop the paper getting out altogether but there was a long queue of vans inside the yard and even when one got out it was still held up as it tried to return.

Unsurprisingly the police fully co-operated with management. Late one night when the scab paper was running short of paper, our pickets were astounded to see one of the managers approaching the heavily padlocked gates on Burton Street with bar cutters, he cut through the chains and swung the gates open just as a paper laden articulated flatbed was driven at speed up the wrong side of Sherwood Street to give it space to clip the pedestrian refuge, swing across the traffic and in through the gate. Number plates were missing. No wonder Pole Carew was later able to say, "Our police were very good."

National officers eventually came in to negotiate the return to work but Pole-Carew had no intention of abiding by agreements and as soon as the workers returned in good faith he started what he called a "two week reign of terror. We were thoroughly unpleasant to those who had been on strike," he told a secret meeting in Portsmouth six years later, "For example, if a striker had swept a floor, the overseer sprinkled dirt over again and made the man sweep it clean for a second time... I constantly discriminated in

favour of those who remained loyal to the company during the strike. They are all paid more than those who went out on strike."

Internal solidarity was supported through the two mass meetings held every day. The last editorial of The Press correctly explained that the workers "knew they were finishing the dispute together, as they began. They would go back together... they go back as different people. As friends, with a real friendship forged under hard times. The sort of friendship that counts." I think that was very true. There were however two major weaknesses in the campaign. Firstly in not understanding an employers viciousness and the need to combat it, the workers conducted the struggle for too long in accordance with some mythical concept of fair play. The ex Naval Commander Pole Carew was conducting all out war. Secondly there was a lack of understanding by some national leaders of the implications for the rest of the industry. Had the conclusion of the 1973 lockout been different it could be argued that the outcomes of the Wapping battles with Rupert Murdoch might have taken a different course.

The five unions involved were: the National Graphical Association (NGA); the National Society of Operative Printers and Assistants (NATSOPA); the National Union of Journalists (NUJ); the Society of Graphical and Allied Trades (SOGAT); and the Society of Lithographic artists and Design Engravers (SLADE), now all merged into the GPMA; and the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU). A full report of Pole Carew's speech in which he advocated petrol bomb threats against union officials appeared in The Journalist October 1st 1980.

Barry Johnson

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NOTTS TRADE UNION NEWS
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WHICH ONE?



HEALTH & SAFETY

HEALTH & SAFETY ENFORCEMENT: NTUSC ACTS

The Safety Representative and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 gives the safety representative of a recognised Trade Union specific rights with regards to accident investigation, access to information etc.

Employers (at least the good ones) should recognise the value of a safety representative and how the influence and support of the Trade Unions can benefit the company. As one of my colleagues put it "safety reps are worth their weight in gold and more".

Nevertheless the employer still has the upper hand to some extent and can choose to ignore advice and recommendations given by the safety rep even where unsafe acts and conditions are known to exist. Many employers take this attitude and unfortunately fail to see the consequences of their actions.

Could safety reps be provided with further powers to persuade employers to improve standards and comply with the law?

Let's look at Australia (no, I don't mean the endless soaps that clog our TV's) I refer to the role of the Australian Union safety representatives. They have powers to issue Provisional Improvement Notices (PIN's) to the employer who is then given 14 days to remedy the problem or take some sort of remedial action. The employer has 7 days from the date of issue of the PIN's to appeal to the enforcing authority who can validate, amend or cancel the notice. However, in the 13 years of this system, only twice have reps issued PIN's which were found to be unjustified.

The amount of time wasted in the UK arguing about standards of safety and improvement usually runs into months. The Australian PIN's system usually sees 80% of serious workplace hazards sorted out within 2 weeks. Overall it is estimated that the Australian method has a 90%+ success rate.

Could this system work here in the UK? Many trade unionists and safety campaigners believe it could. However, we all know that health and safety law is in the main "employer friendly" and no doubt present and future efforts to increase the powers of the reps has been and will be met with fierce opposition.

HSE's policy of enforcement along with that of EHO's is virtually non existent with only the more serious of cases resulting in fines or other punishments although usually derisory. Efforts are concentrated on HSE etc acting in an advisory capacity permitting employers to disregard their legal duties and health and safety of the workforce in the knowledge that a visit from the inspector if there

is one, will probably result in a "damn good telling off". Therefore I will be surprised if support for the introduction of the PIN's system comes from our "enforcing" agencies.

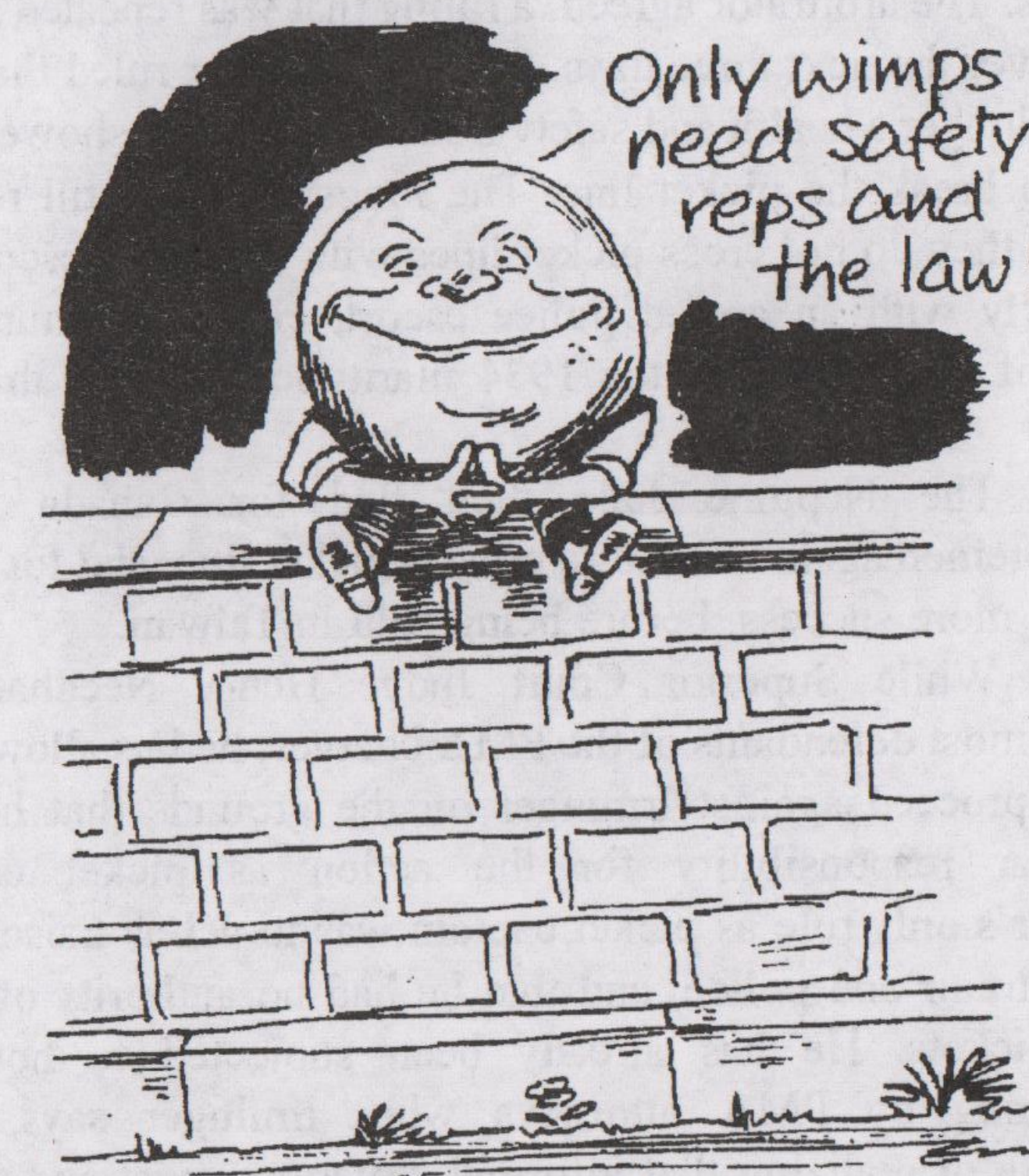
In response to the campaign to increase the powers of the safety rep and for the lack of enforcement Nottinghamshire Trade Union Safety Committee (NTUSC) have taken up a new initiative. NTUSC now issues its own version of PIN's to employers where evidence suggests poor standards exists. Although our version of PIN's have no legal standing they can be used in part or whole in support of any formal complaint to the relevant enforcing authority. (Now there's a contradiction).

Our first notice was issued on the 18th August 1998 to a local engineering company where conditions and practices were at times appalling.

The notices have been fully supported by Trade Unionists, MP's and MEP's.

If you have any comments regarding safety reps and PIN's or any other health and safety related issue you wish to discuss contact NTUSC on 01623 424720 or write to Trade Union News c/o Mansfield Unemployed Workers Centre, 2 Beech Avenue, Mansfield, Notts, NG18 1EY.

Tony Ridgeway
Health and Safety Coordinator



NEWS FROM THE DOCKS



WORLD LABOUR SOLIDARITY THE BOSSES' WORST NIGHTMARE

The Pacific Maritime Association is continuing its efforts to compel IWW member Robert Irminger to name each of the dozens of workers and supporters who picketed Yusen Terminal in the Port of Oakland, California, last Fall, in solidarity with the locked-out Liverpool dockers.

The bosses' association is also demanding the identity of everyone with whom FW Irminger communicated regarding the picket and detailed descriptions of those communications, and a list of all organizations with which he is associated. "A lot of the information I don't have," Irminger notes. "Word got out through the radio and just through an informal network, and people just came down on their own initiative and joined in the picket line. So obviously I didn't know a lot of the people, but of course if I did know their identities I would not divulge them."

Irminger, who is also San Francisco Region chair of the ILWU-affiliated Inland Boatmen's Union, served as picket captain during the three and a half days of picketing. After word got out that the Neptune Jade was due in port, several activists showed up early on a Sunday morning, meeting longshoremen with a picket line when they arrived to work the ship around 7:30 a.m. "Ordinary workers see the sense of solidarity," Irminger told the IWW General Assembly, and so they refused to cross the line.

When an arbitrator rejected FW Irminger's contention that he was a representative of the Liverpool dockers, the longshoremen refused to cross the line on health and safety grounds. The arbitrator agreed, a ruling that was repeated several times over the next three days. But the arbitrator ruled that there was no longer a health and safety issue when police showed up in force to break the picket line. The longshoremen still refused, "saying they do not cross picket lines with an armed escort, and especially with an armed police escort, citing the murder by police of six strikers in the 1934 maritime strike on the West Coast."

The Neptune Jade then fled for Canada, where longshoremen again refused to cross a picket line, and for Japan, with no more success, before being sold in Taiwan.

While Superior Court Judge Henry Needham has cleared most defendants of the PMA charges, he has allowed the suit to proceed against Irminger on the grounds that he bore particular responsibility for the action as picket captain. Irminger's only role as picket captain was to act as liaison with the arbitrator and police, and that he had no authority over the other pickets. He has already been subjected to hours of questioning by PMA attorneys who, Irminger says, seem incapable of realizing that informal structures exist and that he and others acted on their own initiative. "The corporate world does not have a clue about solidarity," he said. "They think there

has to be someone at the top giving orders."

The lawsuit seeks unspecified damages, perhaps running into the hundreds of thousands of dollars. The Pacific Maritime Association has been turning to the courts with increasing frequency in the past two years. Part of the shippers' strategy is to engage the ILWU in as many lawsuits as possible, forcing the union to divert funds and energy to the courts. Dockers closed San Francisco area ports for half a day July 22 and rallied at the courthouse during an attempt by the PMA to subpoena documents about the picket from the ILWU. Judge Needham ruled in the union's favor three weeks later.

The bosses had threatened to sue FW Irminger and other pickets during the action, but he didn't believe them. "They don't sue you for picketing, for god's sake," Irminger said. "But they do sue you, particularly when you're effective." Dockworkers wield enormous industrial power, he noted, and "the shipping bosses' worst nightmare is the port workers working together, coordinating their efforts."

The defense campaign has drawn wide support, "highlighting the fact that you bring out the best in people when you have a militant struggle," Irminger said.

(Contributions for the legal costs can be sent to the Liverpool Dockers Defense Committee, PO Box 2574, Oakland CA 94614.)

Irminger placed the lawsuit in the broader context of a global assault against dockworkers' unions over the past 15 years. Shipping bosses are privatizing ports and smashing unions around the world. Dockers are facing massive automation, speed-up and sub-contracting of support functions in an effort to break their industrial power.

The Liverpool dispute which prompted the picketing of the Neptune Jade ended with the loss of the last organized port in England. West Coast Mexican ports were privatized a few years ago, and the military occupied them when workers struck. A similar scenario developed last year in Santos, Brazil, the largest port in South America.

This year's Australian strike was another battle in this war. And dockers have come to recognize that they can rely only upon their fellow workers for support in this global class war. And workers are learning their lesson. When workers picketed the Los Angeles docks last summer to block unloading of scab cargo they had no picket captain to be sued. And ultimately the scab-loaded cargo had to be returned to Australia.

From the October edition of *Industrial Worker*, newspaper of the Industrial Workers of the World available by post from: IWW, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester LE1 1WB

FEATURE

CALL CENTRES - THE NEW ASSEMBLY LINES?

By the year 2000 hundreds of thousands of workers worldwide will be employed by telephone call centres. It is becoming the new version of the assembly line, and trade unions need to pay attention.

Brussels, September 7 1998 (ICFTU OnLine): Raphael, a 24-year-old qualified translator, spends his day on the telephone. Every morning at 7 o'clock, he dons his headphones, sits in front of a microphone and gets ready to reply to inquiries from the clients of the express courier firm that hired him three months ago. Most of the callers have no idea that he is speaking from Dublin. Clients in Paris, Brussels, Bonn or Amsterdam dial the "green" number that automatically connects them to the "call centre" based in one of the poorest districts of the Irish capital. Thanks to his computer, Raphael can quickly arrange for a parcel to be collected in Geneva, track down a stray package in Bangkok, or inform his correspondent of the prices charged by a carrier in New York or the time to allow for a deliver from Bujumbura. He spends an average of one to two minutes per client. In eight hours he will have dealt with about 200 telephone calls.

COMMUNICATIONS FACTORIES

Continually under stress, closely supervised to the extent that the supervisor often listens in to his calls, insulted by angry clients, Raphael is one of a new generation of workers whose numbers are multiplying thanks both to technological innovation and the falling cost of telecommunications. A new generations whose working conditions bear a suspicious resemblance to the assembly lines of the early industrial era. Some are already comparing these "teleadvisers" to the skilled labourers and describe the call centres as "communications factories". Their numbers are set to increase over the next few years. While Ireland is home to many of the European call centres - and is stepping up the incentives to attract US companies - the United Kingdom is still by far the leader of this field in Europe. According to a report* prepared by the International federation of commercial, professional and technical employees (FIET) more than half the 6,000 call centres in Europe are based in Great Britain. The birthplace of the industrial revolution has 38 per cent of the world market, according to other sources. Paul Cresswell, director general of Sitel UK predicts that "in five years from now call centres in the United Kingdom will have more employees than all of heavy industry put together - mines, iron and steel, the car industry...". Sitel is a US telecommunications company which runs 40 per cent of Britain's call centres, an industry which has somewhere between 160,000 and 200,000 employees in the country. By 2000 this figure will have risen to about a quarter of a million according to the Datamonitor agency.

The call centres were pioneered by the financial sector, although others were quick to emulate. While banks and insurance companies have for some time offered their clients the possibility of obtaining information or carrying out transactions from their home and outside working hours, today it's not just your banking

that can be done by telephone. Travel, clothing, furniture, household equipment, after-sales services, computer support etc. are all covered by the growing number of enterprises that offer a free telephone service for the consumer, often accessible seven days a week and 24 hours a day. The Oréal beauty products call centre in France gets more than 3,500 calls a day, including Saturdays. The 30 "teleadvisers", whose number is to grow to 300, act as long-distance beauticians at the end of a phone line. If you telephone a call centre, it will probably be a woman that answers. In most centres, three quarters of telephonists are women and many are under 30. Based in industrialised regions where unemployment is particularly high, the call centres are a godsend for thousands of workers back on the job market. The employers' main incentives are the low wages, economies of scale and the simplicity of installation. The Dublin-based call centres of the express courier giants such as Federal Express and UPS provide a service for clients in Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands and France. The "German" section of UPS in Dublin employs no less than 150 telephone operators for much lower salaries than those paid across the Rhine. The same applies to the United States where "toll free calls" are directed to the Caribbean.

In Great Britain call centres have enabled enterprises to "transfer staff away from the most expensive regions such as London or south-east England" observes Alastair Hatchett of Incomes Data Services, a British agency that specialises in studying the service and employment market. Callers making telephone inquiries from London will probably hear a Scottish accent at the other end of the line, as British Telecom (BT) has chosen to base its service in Glasgow. Barclaycall, Barclay Bank's tele-banking service, recently announced the opening of a new call centre in north-west England where it plans to employ some 2,000 people.

WORKING CONDITIONS

Call centres have changed the pattern of white-collar working so much that the highly respected London School of Economics decided to study the subject. Its researchers have already commented on the "industrialisation" of a job where the working conditions resemble those of a blue collar more than a white collar worker: productivity bonuses, round-the-clock shiftwork, overtime, etc. A telephonist at a UPS call centre can earn about 1200 dollars net per month. But it is possible to add to that another 100 dollar monthly bonus for each language used other than English or whatever their mother-tongue is that they are working with. There are also bonuses based on turnover and on courtesy to clients.... "So the bonuses become a bit of a lottery" one teleadviser told us. "You never know in advance who is calling or whether it will be lucrative." As for their level of courtesy, it is left to the supervisor to judge, by listening in during the day to his staff's calls. Everything is aimed at speeding up the pace: incoming calls must be responded to within fifteen seconds, the conversation must be kept as short as possible and, to add to the stress, each operator has a console in front of them with flashing lights which indicate calls

CALL CENTRES - THE NEW ASSEMBLY LINES? (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9)

that are waiting. "The possibilities for monitoring the behaviour and measuring output in call centres are amazing to behold. The 'tyranny of the assembly line' is but a Sunday-school picnic compared with the control that management can exercise in computer technology" comments Sue Fernie of the London School of Economics.

The new communications production line poses many challenges for the trade unions. In some industries the call centres are an obvious threat to jobs, as the New Zealand financial workers' unions have found. In replying to a FIET questionnaire, they summarised the situation as follows: "clients are encouraged to use the telephone rather than go to their bank and their call will not go to their branch. Many banks have closed down branches and cut jobs."

On the other hand, FIET admits, the growing use of call centres in other sectors is a source of new jobs. Jobs which can regenerate regions that have been brought to their knees by mass unemployment. Trade unions therefore need to develop a strategy that aims both at protecting existing jobs where they are under threat, and at organising workers in the new call centres. It does not appear to be an impossible mission. The call centres are the modern version of mass production, usually fertile ground for the trade unions. Centres often employ several hundred operators in vast premises reminiscent of assembly lines. Furthermore, many enterprises that decide to set up call centres already have a unionised workforce, covered by collective agreements that could extend to their telephone operators.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

The sometimes deplorable working conditions in the call centres should also encourage employees to turn to the unions. The first

signs of occupational health problems are beginning to emerge. The FIET's British affiliate in the banking sector, BIFU, has drawn attention to the increased risk of Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI) to which telephone operators are exposed because of their constant use of the computer.

The union has also detected another problem: more and more telephone operators in the call centres are losing their voices. The worst affected are the part-time employees notes BIFU "who may work up to five hours without a break". Coughs, irritated throats and respiratory problems are the first symptoms of an infection which could become an "occupational" disease if nothing is done.

The trade unions aren't always given red-carpet treatment, however. Barclaycall is fiercely opposed to a trade union presence in its new English site and in Germany the telebanking arms of Citycorps and Commerzbank are excluded from the collective agreement covering the banking sector. Some employers play on the rapid turnover of staff, linked to the stress of the job and the lack of career prospects to discourage unionisation. Yet unions seem determined to rise to the challenge and seize this rare opportunity to organise a new sector.

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If you want to be heard - speak in

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THINKPIECE

SERVICES FOR *OUR* COMMUNITY

Throughout Nottingham and the surrounding areas of Broxtowe, Gedling and Rushcliffe we have all seen the quality of life deteriorate over the past years. Whether it be through cheaply mended roads with ever returning pot holes, advice and employment schemes for local people closing as their workers are made redundant, swimming pools being shut or constantly threatened with closure. We have seen rising charges for home-helps and day centres and bus passes for elderly people being withdrawn. The list of shameful attacks on our living standards grows year by year.

With the Labour Government ignoring the groundswell of discontent which got them elected and simply offering the same dreary commitment to cutting funds for local people this coming year promises more such cuts - every other street light being turned off, school buildings rotting around the pupils, closures of elderly peoples homes etc.

We are calling people together to say no - enough is absolutely enough. Not only do we not want any more cuts, it's about time that we got together to say what we

do want. Nottingham & District Trades Union Council has brought together trades unions, community groups and users of public services to plan a series of actions to defend our services and demand community services as they should be.

So, if you want to get involved in marching, in petitioning, in direct action such as sit-ins and occupations, in writing letters and anything else you can think of - join us to plan the route to community services which the people of Nottingham deserve.

**TUESDAY 10TH NOVEMBER, 7:30P.M.
INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY
CENTRE**

There will be a recall meeting before Christmas to review action and discuss further plans - so if you can't make this meeting but want to be involved ring Nottm 958 2369.

**Nottingham & District Trades Union Council
From: workshop118@gn.apc.org (118 Workshop)**

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